

- 1 You are going to read a magazine article. Six paragraphs have been removed from the article. Choose from the paragraphs (A-G) the one which fits each gap (1-6). There is one extra paragraph that you do not need to use.

TIP FOR READING EXAMS

In gapped-text activities, study the wording immediately before each gap. This will tell you the sort of information you are looking for. Remember to also look at the wording after a gap – this may be what you need to confirm the answer.

► EXAM SUCCESS page 129

Are sports stars born or made?

What separates a competent player in a school or local team, from a gold-medal winning star? At what stage is it possible to identify potential new stars – in childhood, the teenage years or not until adulthood? Is that potential determined by their genes or their environment? Certainly, there is plenty of superficial evidence for the importance of genes.

1 ☐ Well, the short answer is, maybe. That's because, when we dig deeper into the influence of genes, we find that this is a highly complex area of science. Let's take something as straightforward as height. It's reasonable to assume that someone's height is going to have a major impact on how far they can progress in certain sports like basketball or high jump. And research has also established that it's a highly heritable characteristic – 80% being down to genes and 20% environment and diet.

2 ☐ None of this is to say that genes aren't important. It's just that there are other aspects of sports performance that are going to be easier to identify and manipulate. For

starters, few young athletes would be able to get involved with sports at all without help from their parents, who provide valuable resources including transportation, finance and emotional support. Then it's also widely recognised that coaches contribute to an athlete's development in numerous ways.

3 ☐ Indeed, Sir Clive Woodward, formerly the England rugby coach, believes that there are very few things that cannot be coached. However, most coaches would also recognise that there are certain influences that they do not control and one of the most crucial of these is the wider culture. Why do so many good ice hockey players come from Canada? Footballers from Brazil? Rugby players from New Zealand?

4 ☐ Admittedly, there's little that most sportspeople can do to influence this. But what is relatively easy to change is where a young athlete grows up. Evidence suggests that this should be neither too small nor too big: minor towns lack the necessary facilities and in larger centres the facilities become overloaded. There's also the debate about age. Is it better to allow children to play a broad spectrum of sports before choosing a specialisation, or to specialise young?

5 ☐ Given this, specialising too young could be a mistake. But whichever route an athlete takes, this has nothing to do with genetics and everything to do with environment. So is there any role at all for genetics in determining top athletes? The answer seems to be a qualified 'yes'. That's because knowing more about our genetic make-up can provide information of great value to athletes.

6 ☐ The truth, then, is that top athletes need both nature and nurture. Few, if any, are going to make it to the very top on raw talent alone; it will take years of dedicated training and coaching as well. But certain inherent physical abilities may predispose an individual to reach the highest ranks of a particular sport.



A The most obvious is to optimise the athlete's training and so enable them to advance to higher levels of attainment. But their role is wider than is generally understood and may include everything from nutrition to psychology.

B The choice may vary depending on the individual. Remember, however, that many sports complement each other, lending skills that can transfer to another discipline and enhance a youthful athlete's abilities.

C However, that's where the simplicity ends. Scientists have – so far – identified hundreds of thousands of different variations in DNA that can account for how tall someone is.

D How else can we explain why some athletes become world class within 12 months of taking up a sport, while others train for years and are never more than mediocre? Is there any other explanation for why certain countries like Jamaica seem to dominate sprint races while East African athletes often dominate distance running events?

E It may be the sort of foods or training programmes that are most beneficial for their body type, or learning more about their susceptibility to certain injuries. And it might provide insights into which sport they're most likely to excel at.

F That's because athletes have so far shown very little enthusiasm for this sort of experimentation. Instead, they have preferred to rely on established techniques.

G This is one aspect of elite sporting success that's difficult to pin down, but, say the experts, hard to overstate. The fact remains that certain national identities seem to have so much invested in a particular sport that it makes further success in that sport inevitable.